

# **Slovakia's Key Goals And Interests As Regards**

## **THE MIDDLE EAST And NORTH AFRICA**

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### **1. Introduction**

The Middle East and North Africa represent a geographic area (further only "the Area") in which a vast majority of nations speak affiliated languages, share and cherish similar cultural, religious and civilisation-related values. These values serve as the basis of integration processes and establishing regional and sub-regional political and economic organisations, associations and unions in the Area. As for the geographic definition of the Area and its countries, this paper follows the prevailing Arabic and Islamic culture and encompasses the following countries: **Morocco, Mauritania, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, Sudan, the Palestinian territories, Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Oman, Qatar, Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates, Yemen, Iraq** as well as **Israel and Iran**.

Even though the Area is not on the priorities list of Slovakia's foreign policy, its importance from a regional and global standpoint makes it necessary for Slovakia to adopt a competent strategic and tactical stance and approach to it and to define the basic plans, goals and foreign policy instruments as well as relations so that they reflect, on the one hand, the specific national interests and needs of Slovakia and, on the other hand, comply with the requirements and objectives associated with the process of Euro-Atlantic integration and our future full-fledged membership of the EU and NATO.

The growing importance and significance of the Area to the Slovak Republic ensue from, and are shaped by, the characteristics and evolution of the Area and their broad impact on global developments and the international community, on the one hand, and by the expanding and profound integration processes in the Euro-Atlantic space and the associated new tasks and challenges that the EU and NATO are beginning to face in connection with the Area.

The significance and importance of the Area are determined by the following facts:

- In geographic terms, it is the closest region perceived as "different" in terms of cultural, religious and civilisation-related values with historic links to, and effects on, the European continent;

- In geopolitical and geostrategic terms, it serves as a gateway to Europe, Asia and Africa and concentrates the world's oil and gas supplies as well as significant deposits of other minerals, all of which makes it a focus of strategic interests;
- In commercial and economic terms, it has a great potential for developing economic relations and generating more trade in industrial goods, agricultural products, raw materials and semi-finished products with a possibility to build on the good relations from the past; unsaturated markets and room for investment in tourism and related infrastructure;
- In security terms, it is a turbulent area undergoing social changes and transformation processes, all of which gives rise to a number of broad risks and threats such as poverty, explosive population growth, unemployment, social upheavals, radical political Islamism, economic and political instability, illegal migration, organised crime, traffic in drugs and humans, terrorism and proliferation of weapons of mass destruction;
- Competition and rivalry between nations, unresolved conflicts and territorial disputes in the Area, especially between Arab countries and Israel, highlight the importance of impacts on security and stability even outside the Area;
- As Euro-Atlantic integration expands and becomes more profound, the position and role of the EU as a regional power with a major geopolitical and economic influence increase. As a result, the EU is demonstrating a keen interest in, and growing responsibility for, developments in the Area and realises the need to deploy its potential and influence by means of co-ordinated and effective policy in which the Slovak Republic will also have to play a corresponding and responsible part;
- NATO becomes increasingly aware of the fact that the security and stability of Europe and of the US is directly linked to security and stability in the area – hence the increasing interest of NATO in the Area and in advancing co-operation and closer relations with the countries of the Area aiming to chart their movement towards greater stability, security and collaboration. In so doing, NATO is increasingly emphasising the preparedness of the candidate countries as future members of the Alliance to adopt a competent strategic position vis-a-vis developments in the Area, enabling an enlarged Alliance to respond to new trends, master necessary competence and effectively confront new security threats and challenges originating in the Area.

## **2. Basic considerations underlying Slovakia's approach to the countries in the Area**

National interests, needs and foreign policy priorities, particularly those relevant to European integration and accession to the EU and NATO, are the main factors shaping Slovakia's relations with the countries in the Area. They represent, on the one hand, the objective of our efforts and, on the other hand, an important instrument and a way to formulate and promote our national, regional and pan-European interests. By harmonising its approach to the Area with the position and approach of the EU and NATO and by actively participating in their policies and programmes, Slovakia will

also gain new and effective possibilities to advance own interests and attain and its goals. The driving consideration should be our national needs and interests as well as the real possibilities offered by the principal characteristics and features of the Slovak Republic, which should be used to the maximal extent possible in accordance with the general line pursued by the EU and NATO.

In terms of size, population and economic potential, Slovakia is a smaller European country lacking energy sources and raw materials. However, the appeal of Slovakia lies in its cultural heritage, historical monuments, natural sights and attractive tourist destinations, remarkably high education standards, a skilled labour force, advanced industries (in particular, in the petrochemical, food, pulp and paper, construction and defence sectors), sophisticated agriculture, sought after health care and rehabilitation services and facilities and a favourable geopolitical position.

Slovakia has also gained first-hand experience in implementing economic, social and political reform which may be useful to many countries in the Area that are either going through a similar transition or are encouraged to undergo one by a number of internal or external factors and reasons. Slovakia is therefore in a position to share own practical experiences and know-how pertaining to democratisation and economic liberalisation, institution building as well as peaceful and unimpeded transition:

- from a totalitarian regime to a democracy based on the rule of law, respect for human rights and freedoms, civic society and free mass media;
- from a centrally planned economy to a free market and a liberal economy;
- from an isolated socialist economy to one integrated into global organisations, structures and processes;
- from a centralised, authoritarian and ideologically guided state administration to decentralised public administration, based on local and regional branches of state administration and self-governing authorities abiding by the principle of subsidiarity and maximum proximity of public administration to the citizen to facilitate to the extent possible direct and active public involvement;
- from an atheistic state bent on suppressing the freedom of religion and worship in which the church is directed and controlled by the state to one based on religious freedom and tolerance and abiding by the cultural, religious and spiritual tradition and heritage;
- from a stand-alone state to one that is a full member of the EU and NATO enjoying all relevant rights and capable of assuming all obligations, tasks and responsibilities associated with such membership.

The preparation for NATO membership further enables Slovakia to share experiences and know-how of modernising the armed forces, improving the combat potential, compatibility and ability to co-operate in a co-ordinated fashion as well as confront new responsibilities and threats. Slovakia has a good record of participating in peace-keeping missions and operations in the Area, especially those under the auspices of the United Nations, which has earned this country international acclaim and appraisal.

Slovakia generally maintains very good and fairly developed relations with the countries in the Area that date back to the time of the former Czechoslovakia. Having

emerged from the erstwhile common state, Slovakia should follow up and strengthen these relations. Admittedly, in the past these relations were to a large extent driven and shaped by ideological considerations and needs, therefore, it is necessary to rebuild them on a new foundation reflecting the economic and political changes that have taken place in Slovak society, Slovakia's ambitions regarding Euro-Atlantic integration and the new role ensuing from full membership in the EU and NATO.

The recent visits by Slovak dignitaries to the Area and by leaders of the countries from the Area to Slovakia have been major milestones in our relations. In particular, this relates to the visits to Slovakia by President H. Mubarak of Egypt in 1994, President E. Lahoud of Lebanon in June 2002, President A. Bouteflik of Algeria in June 2003 and President M. Katzav of Israel in June 2003; the visits by President R. Schuster of Slovakia to Israel and the Palestinian autonomous territories in February 2000, to Lebanon and Syria in April 2001, to Algeria in April 2002 and to Lebanon in October 2002 as well as other visits planned in the immediate future.

The advantage of Slovakia, compared to many other European countries, is that its relations with the countries of the Area are not overshadowed by a colonial past.

### **3. Principal interests and objectives of the Slovak Republic in the Area**

From an economic, security and geopolitical standpoint, the Area is one the world's most important and sensitive ones. The principal interest of Slovakia is to pursue a balanced and consistent policy vis-a-vis the countries in the Area, a policy without unnecessary discrediting and unsustainable compromises, one abiding by the underlying principles of EU and NATO policies, to develop political and economic relations and contribute to stability, security, economic prosperity and the political transformation of these countries.

The interests of the Slovak Republic:

#### **a) In the political field:**

- A peaceful solution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict based on the underlying UN Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338, the land for peace principle, the associated Resolutions 1397, 1402 and 1403, the emergence as a result of negotiations of a sovereign, democratic and viable Palestinian state and the existence of Israel within secure, indisputable, peaceful and internationally recognised borders;
- A peaceful solution of the Arab-Israeli disputes and territorial claims on the basis of negotiations and relevant UN Security Council Resolutions;
- Strengthening relations with integration groups in the Area and with countries demonstrating a practical interest, and the ability to be engaged, in implementing an integration framework and operating within it;
- Smooth transformation of society and an evolutionary political transition towards the establishment of the rule of law, a modern public administration system and an open civil and democratic society and its institutions;

- Respect for, and protection of, human and civil rights and basic freedoms;
- Respect for, and protection of, the rights of ethnic and religious minorities as well as cultural communities;
- Maintaining and developing co-operation and dialogue between the civilisations and cultures of Europe and the Area;
- Participation in the Barcelona process following Slovakia's accession to the EU and the incorporation of Slovakia's interests and goals into EUROMED;
- Participation of Slovakia in the North-South Centre of the Council of Europe;
- Gaining support from the countries in the Area for Slovakia's bid to become a non-permanent UN Security Council member in 2006-2007;

b) In the **economic field:**

- Smooth economic transition of the countries in the Area leading towards gradual liberalisation, privatisation and the establishment of a sound market environment;
- Economic stability and prosperity of the countries in the Area;
- Development of economic relations and expand trade;
- Increase agricultural and animal husbandry output and trade;
- Tap new sources of foreign investment and develop financial and banking links with the countries in the Area;
- Build up air transport links between Slovakia and the countries in the Area;
- Participation by Slovak businesses in the economic advancement of the countries in the Area, the construction of industrial parks and zones, irrigation systems, water management and water control projects, turn-key projects and the provision of expert advice, specialist teams and know-how;

c) In the **security field:**

- Maintain and further develop co-operation between the countries of the Area and Euro-Atlantic security institutions with the participation of Slovakia and so strengthen stability and security in the Area;
- Co-operate in the fight against illegal migration, drugs, trafficking in humans, particularly in women and children, against organised crime, international terrorism and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction;
- Participate, in accordance with the efforts of the international community, in peace-keeping missions and operations, especially those under UN auspices;
- Continue technical and expert co-operation in the military field and build up the defence industry in the countries of the Area in accordance with EU and NATO policies and principles;
- Participate, to the extent possible, in the Mediterranean dialogue after Slovakia becomes a NATO member;

**d) In other fields:**

- Protection of the environment, and cultural values and sites;
- Development of tourist industry and tourism;
- Ensure direct and unimpeded access to clients from the countries of the Area – including visa policy considerations - to Slovakia's spas, therapeutic and rehabilitation facilities and effectively promote those facilities;
- Effective co-operation and exchanges in the cultural, education, research, healthcare and sport sectors, including financial support by Slovakia in the form of fellowships and other educational contributions and grants;
- Import and export of cultural values;
- Co-operation and development of the third sector and non-government organisations;
- Co-operation in the medical field, psychology and in dealing with the bodily and mental implications and trauma of armed conflicts.

**4. Conclusions**

Although, objectively, the Slovak Republic has limited resources, possibilities and means to do so, it can nevertheless make a tangible contribution to a smooth, peaceful and successful course of social, economic and political transition in the countries of the Area and to the stability and security of the Area as a whole by pursuing a clearly defined, co-ordinated, consistent and balanced foreign policy. To achieve this goal, it is necessary to enhance Slovakia's activities in the Area and strengthen the existing base and relations established at the time of Czechoslovakia by elevating them to a qualitatively new level reflecting the current nature and interests of Slovakia. This would facilitate the attainment of the national interests and goals of the Slovak Republic, would contribute to the implementation of Euro-Atlantic plans and the overall improvement of the social, economic and political position of the Slovak Republic domestically, in the Euro-Atlantic space and the world at large.